

# THE CHIMERA

## A Rough Beast

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Published at 2 East 93rd Street, New York, N. Y.; 35 cents a copy, three numbers for \$1.00. Unsolicited manuscripts not returned unless accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelope.

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 Printed by Van Vechten Press, Metuchen, N. J.

# The End Pocket

*By Milton Klonsky*



## I

Haunting these vizored cathedrals  
My lord is rod, my world is green.  
Driven upon its central core  
The ball rebuffed and turned by walls  
Of baize, follows a further plan  
And proves an open corridor.

## II

The measured poise, the click, the kiss  
Of rod and ball, is ritual  
That every soul and star repeats  
And burns upon its burning space.  
Assist! beyond this mass, this hall  
Candled by smoking cigarettes

## III

That haze the fretted roof with prayer.  
I think—the image burns my eyes—  
Of those enduring souls I love  
Who huddle, clutch and press their fear  
In this cold place, yet keep their ways  
Fixed by the rod by which they move.

## IV

Waiting, with all their being coiled  
And wound upon a shuttling tense  
That past and future intricate,  
They rage time's come and go, but snarled  
Like them I puff my nonchalance,  
A school-boy and his cigarette.

## V

The body, its key passion can  
Open the womb and grave, be poised  
Erect within the double wound;  
Not soul, soul blunders on a green  
And turning world that is amazed,  
Its unimaginable goal space-bound.

## VI

But rides upon a heaven crossed  
By balls of burning black and brown  
Planets, and wheeling galaxies,  
Where looming stars like rockets burst  
Explosions of bright worlds, and burn  
New lamps in time, new ways, new laws!

## VII

Is it then lost? The hot discharge  
That laboured through eternity  
This world, before it cooled its wrath,  
Does it repeat my bunched emerge  
When my torn mother monstered me,  
Blind, alive between death and death?

## VIII

My spun and billiard words return.  
These strategies, these plots, like balls  
That cross and cross, how can they meet  
And build this world? And stand like stone?  
Both ride one law yet parallels  
That cannot touch and lunge at fate.

## IX

O Master, whose great rod can move  
Through ages of immeasurable light  
The heavy planets and the stars:  
Show us direction of your love,  
Restore us, for whose love we wait  
Lighting our cigarette from yours.

# Deviceless Darkness

*By Arthur Mizener*



And as she turns from prayer to meet this lord,  
Efficient stagehands enter to remove  
The altar, vests unbuttoned, certain, bored;  
And one by one, with terrible precision,  
The spots drop and the footlights fade away,  
And the slow explanatory houselights rise.  
The prince's angry suffering and his love  
Become a startled little man's surprise,  
A thing of rouge and grease and indecision;  
And quietly the rose of May  
With loss of ceremony slowly dies  
Before our darkening hearts and helpless eyes.

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## "OYSTER SHELLS"

LEO MEISSNER, born in Detroit in 1895, received his early training at the Detroit School of Fine Arts and The Art Students League. Forced to give up painting in order to earn a living, he taught himself the art of wood engraving.

Draughtsmanship is highly important, he believes, to the success of wood engraving, since this art is fundamentally the skilful execution of lines in their proper weight and direction. Through this the engraver can create textures and surfaces to indicate his subject matter in all its individuality. Earlier the engraver had been a master craftsman and developed proportionate skill. Today he is both artist and craftsman, not only conceiving the idea but also executing it.

In the last fifteen years Mr. Meissner's prints have been shown all over the country both in individual shows and in leading print exhibitions. He has been awarded a number of prizes.





# The Burnt Norton Trilogy

*By Philip Wheelwright*



THERE IS reason, I think, to regard Mr. T. S. Eliot's three recent long poems—*Burnt Norton*, *East Coker*, and *The Dry Salvages*—as forming a poeto-philosophical trilogy. The poems are similar in theme and structure, with occasional continuations of imagery and echoes of phrase or accent. Their common theme is man's victimization by time, his goal which is not of the nature of time but of stillness, the haunted moments of time which seem to promise a glimpse of an otherworldly reality more significant and self-justified than temporal experience as we have known it, the nostalgic and quasi-reminiscent quality of such moments, their deceptiveness, the barren disillusionment which follows their termination, and finally the discipline of soul which must be undertaken in order to triumph over the endless cycle of light and dark, hope and despair, "death by water" and dry rock, deception and disillusionment, which constitutes the time-pattern of our lives. The structures of the poems, moreover, are parallel; each consists of five sections, the fourth and the first half of the second being more lyrical in tone than the remainder. A further likeness is found in the bold use of direct philosophical query, argument, and speculation as elements in the poetic synthesis.

*Burnt Norton* gets its peculiar accent, in large part, from Eliot's combination of the paradoxical philosophy of Heraclitus with elements from the mystical journey of St. John of the Cross and the fresh contextualization of symbols already familiar from earlier poems—particularly from *Gerontion*, *The Waste Land*, *Ash*

*Wednesday, Animula, Marina, Cape Ann, and The Rock*. An important part of the sense is announced in the two Heraclitean fragments which appear on the title page and which might be translated thus: (1) "Although the Word is common (available?) to all, most men live as if they had each a private wisdom of his own." (2) "The way up and the way down are one and the same." To consider Eliot's development of these seemingly disparate ideas will lead us close to the heart of the poem.

(1) *Although the Word*, etc. Each person discovers moments of bright refuge in his own rose garden; each follows the deception of the thrush into his own first world, which is not the first world of any other. This first world is not a shared supernatural actuality as in Maeterlinck's *Bluebird*; it is that quality of the hauntingly familiar in experience which, although it flashes across experience so transiently, gives significance, or the illusion of significance, to our world.

And the bird called, in response to  
The unheard music hidden in the shrubbery,  
And the unseen eyebeam crossed, for the roses  
Had the look of flowers that are looked at.  
There they were as our guests, accepted and accepting.

The contradictions *unheard music* and *unseen eyebeam* are appropriate. In plain prose, one has the illumined feeling that such qualities are present, but while offered through sense-experience they are in contradiction to its more obvious aspects. Mr. Leonard Unger, in an admirable recent article,\* appears to think that the roses represent a throwback to our normal world, having been looked at by drooping multitudes until they have lost their freshness. This is one of the very few points at which I disagree with Mr. Unger's interpretation. The roses are among the "other echoes" dwelling in the garden; they are said to be our guests only because the garden is, for the moment, so inviolably ours. Their appearance of being looked at comes not from the gaze of the crowd but from the unseen eyebeam in the vibrant air. The

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\* T. S. Eliot's *Rose Garden: A Persistent Theme* by Leonard Unger, *Southern Review*, Spring 1942.

flowers in Botticelli's *Primavera*, and in a simpler, more placid way those in da Brescia's *Madonna in the Rose Garden*, disclose something of this quality.

The formal pattern in which we now move—the bird, the roses, other garden echoes and ourselves, or is this too definite?—carries us into the formal English garden maze, known as a “box circle,” that surrounds the pool. The pool, consistently with the familiar *Waste Land* imagery, is drained and dry; it fills with water as we look, the lotus arises, the surface glitters out of heart of light, then a cloud passes and the pool is seen to be empty—recalling that moment of sharper ecstasy in the hyacinth scene of *The Waste Land*, from which the disillusionment (*Oed' und leer das Meer*) was correspondingly more abrupt. Here at least we have, or seem to have, a companion and protector.

Go, said the bird, for the leaves were full of children,  
Hidden excitedly, containing laughter.  
Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind  
Cannot bear very much reality.

Why does the bird, who just now invited us into the garden, warn us urgently away? What is the reality of which humankind cannot bear too much? I cannot agree with Mr. Unger that the garden itself is meant; that, while it lasts, is not reality but nostalgic illusion, and is very easily borne. Why am I chilled with quick fear at the laughter of children among the leaves? Is it because they, too, are about to vanish like the water of the pool? Or worse, might they in another moment suffer one of those nightmare transformations so recurrent in Eliot's poetry? What if the leaves should turn out to be the limp leaves of the Hima-vant jungle crouching and humped in silence?

(2) *The way up*, etc. Heraclitus offers promising material to poets. Life teems with contradictory situations, which systematic philosophers are at pains to resolve into logical components, but which Heraclitus, like the poets, attempts to describe as they appear to us in moments of heightened sensitivity. “The way up” meant to Heraclitus, outwardly, the qualitative movement from rock and earth through the intermediate stages of mud, water,

cloud, air, and æther, to the rarest and uppermost of all states of existence, which is fire; "the way down" meant the contrary movement. Both movements are in process all the time in all things that exist, hence they are said to be "the same." Existence therefore involves unceasing tension between upward and downward pulls—toward the realm of rarity, warmth, light, and toward the realm of density, cold, dark. The pull is not only observed in physical phenomena, it operates too in our souls. "Souls delight to get wet . . . to bathe like swine in mire . . . but the best soul is like a dry beam of light." The inner, arcane meaning of Heraclitus *up* and *down* is thus intensely moral, and may have been connected with religious mysteries of death and rebirth, like those celebrated at Eleusis.

Garlic and sapphires in the mud  
Clot the bedded axle-tree.

In this couplet the identity—more strictly, the simultaneity—of up and down is illustrated by the ancient symbol of the Wheel. A familiar development of the symbol is the Wheel of Fortune in mediaeval and renaissance iconography, whirling men ceaselessly upward to prosperity and downward to misery. But always at the center of the Wheel's movement, conditioning it, is the axle-tree. Although the visible axle-tree evidently turns, for it is an empirical part of the wheel, there is an axis at the center of the axle-tree, a mathematically pure point, which remains unmoving—"the still point of the turning world"—and which "reconciles" the contradictions of the surrounding movement. This perfect axis, therefore, symbolizes the ultimate point of human aspiration; garlic and sapphires, the two kinds of usual impediment to its attainment. Garlic has symbolic affinities with some of the less lovely images of Eliot's earlier poems—"the damp souls of housemaids," Gerontion's dull head among windy spaces, Apeneck Sweeney erect, the rat with slimy belly, Mr. Eugenides, the young man carbuncular, the "winter evening round behind the gashouse," the cactus land, "the toothed gullet of an agèd shark." Sapphires symbolize, I judge, whatever is deceptively lovely in experience; and are reminiscent, therefore, of

such earlier symbols as Princess Volupine, *la figlia che piange*, Belladonna Lady of the Rocks, the jewels of the modern Cleopatra and the eyes turned to pearls, Elizabeth and Leicester beating oars on the not yet sullied Thames, the silken girls bringing sherbet, and the many other scenes and references suggestive of promise exceeding hope of fulfillment. Sapphires and garlic thus reinforce the up-down movement of the Wheel and of the imagery in the fifteen-line stanza in which they occur.

But all this errs by oversimplifying; the Heraclitean paradox requires extension. The way up and the way down, though the same, are yet not the same. For sapphires suggest also the blue rocks of *Ash Wednesday*, St. Simeon's Roman hyacinths blooming in bowls, and in the present poem the experience of the rose garden,—symbols not utterly deceptive, for their promise is indeed real if only we undertake the required self-discipline and do not expect fulfillment in terms of the temporally actual, i.e., of rewards. "The trilling wire in the blood"—an electrical metaphor that recalls also the bird's song—is the physiological correlative of the rosegarden experience; for although it is a disturbing factor and the cause of illusions, its promptings induce moments of insight into the world's moving pattern, whence we can

... hear upon the sodden floor  
Below, the boarhound and the boar  
Pursue their pattern as before  
But reconciled among the stars.

The music of these lines needs no comment, nor does their pictorial evocation of a tapestry of the hunt. Boarhound and boar, alluding no doubt to the myth of Tammuz or Adonis (cf. Floret in *Animula*), symbolize the rhythm of desire and death, summer and winter.

The remainder of Part II and much of the rest of the poem employ various devices of contrast, paradox and approximation in order to evoke a sense of the stillness that transcends all discriminations on the intellectual plane as it transcends all strivings on the volitional. Among the devices are: negative contradictories ("neither from not towards . . . neither arrest nor move-

ment"); separation of ideas where in their ordinary interpretations the first necessarily implies the second (elevation without motion, concentration without elimination), forcing a rejection of the ordinary interpretations; contrast of the unmoving stillness with "the enchainment of past and future," which however is indispensable to us who would be protected from the unendurable intensities of heaven and damnation, and besides "only through time time is conquered."

Dantesque imagery, as in *The Waste Land*, appears in Part III. The "dim light" recalls the *aera bruna* of the *Inferno*; a light that is "neither daylight / Investing form with lucid stillness . . . / Nor darkness to purify the soul . . ." The crowd that flowed over London bridge now becomes

Men and bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind . . .

Driven on the wind that sweeps the gloomy hills of London . . .

Not here the darkness, in this twittering world.

"Twittering" recalls the bird in the garden and echoes the *twit twit twit* and associated symbols in *The Waste Land*. The kingfisher in Part IV continues this theme, but by suggesting the religious meaning of the Fisher King it reminds of the unrealized spiritual possibilities latent in such experiences. Such possibilities can be realized, it is indicated somewhat Platonically in the closing lines, only through the self-discipline that has learned to distinguish love from desire, and to develop love out of desire. Desire is movement; love is "unmoving, / Only the cause and end of movement"—although as love is knowable to us only through its temporal embodiments and symbols, it is hard to distinguish from desire. It may come to us perhaps "in a shaft of sunlight / Even while the dust moves," as when we hear "the hidden laughter / Of children in the foliage . . ." But such guises are impermanent; "the waste sad time" stretches before and after.

\* \* \*

*East Coker* has been so competently analysed, and its principle allusions made explicit, by Mr. J. J. Sweeney\* that I am content

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\* *East Coker: A Reading* by James Johnson Sweeney: *Southern Review*, Spring 1941.

in the main to refer the reader to his article. For the benefit of those to whom that recourse is unavailable the principal literary allusions in the poem may be listed, in approximate order of occurrence, as follows: the motto on the chair of state of Mary Queen of Scots, "*En ma fin est mon commencement*"; Heraclitus' fragmentary remark, "In the circle beginning and end are identical," which reorients his paradox already discussed concerning the identity of the upward and the downward way; Sir Thomas Elyot of East Coker (?-1546), *The Boke named The Gouvernour*, Bk.I, Chap. XXI, entitled "Wherefore in the good ordre of daunsinge a man and a woman daunseth to gether"; *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, description of the great Grimpen Mire; *Samson Agonistes*, "O dark dark dark, amid the blaze of noon . . ."; Vaughan's *Ascension Hymn*, "They are all gone into the world of light . . ."; St. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul* and *The Living Flame of Love*—particularly in the latter the description of the soul under medical treatment and of its being pierced "with a dart of most enkindled love"; Pascal, *Pensées*, No. 552, "Jesus suffers in his passions the torments which men inflict on Him . . ."; Marvell's *Dialogue between Soul and Body*, "Constrain'd not only to indure / Diseases, but what's worse, the Cure. . . ." I am indebted to Mr. Sweeney for these citations, some of which I would have missed had his researches not been available. The important thing, of course, is that the reader first grasp then transcend such details, fitting them into an intuitively sensed pattern. The synthesis is facilitated by noting the complex play of several integrating symbols: time (in Part I, the first seventeen lines of Part II, and Part V); the grimpen mire (II); darkness (III); the sick healing the sick (IV); the sea (end of I and end of V). The last of these furnishes a transition to the dominant imagery of *The Dry Salvages*.

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*The Dry Salvages*—referring topographically to a "small group of rocks, with a beacon, off the north-east coast of Cape Ann"—continues the theme of *East Coker*, although distinguished by a different basic imagery, by its assimilation of the

philosophy of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, and by a more affirmative and hopeful tone. The brief evocation of the sea at the end of the earlier poem—"The wave cry, the wind cry, the vast waters / Of the petrel and the porpoise"—is now expanded into a persistent imagery and hypostatized into an actual locale. Other symbols are connected with the sea: the river, the rock, the tolling bell, the wreckage on the river and on the beach, and (as always) time. Mr. Leonard Unger, in the article already cited, suggests that ocean, river, and rocks are symbolic expressions of "the primitive terror" (Eliot's phrase), in that while seeming to be controlled by secular civilization they continue actually as menacing and destructive; and of the sea he adds: "In its immense shapelessness it represents history as other than 'sequence' and 'development'." So far I am in agreement; the sea is nearly equivalent to history's cunning corridors in *Gerontion*, the brokenness of development in *The Waste Land* epitomized in "These fragments I have shored against my ruins," and the paradoxes at the beginning of *Burnt Norton*. Its time, other than the time of clocks and calendars, is measured by the tolling bell, rung by the unhurried ground swell. It is a time "between midnight and dawn, when the past is all deception, / The future futureless"—not ordered into a linear progress but catching us unawares in moments of sudden illumination. Into the sea flows the river, "a strong brown god—sullen, untamed and intractable. / . . . Unhonoured, unpropitiated / By worshippers of the machine, but waiting, watching and waiting." What does the river symbolize—beyond that "primitive terror," that Sense of the Abyss as Dr. Tillich calls it, which permeates all the major symbols of the poem? I take it to be a near-equivalent of "the trilling wire in the blood" in *Burnt Norton* and of "the fever sings in mental wires" in *East Coker*; what I have called the physiological correlative of the moment of illumined experience; the pulsebeat by which we respond to the hyacinth ecstasy, to the laughter in the garden, and now to "the sea howl and the sea yelp." For it is stated explicitly that "the river is within us, the sea is all about us." And wreckage clutters them both. The sea tosses up to shore "its hints

of earlier and other creation: / The starfish, the hermit crab, the whale's backbone." Our losses, too, it tosses up—shattered lobsterpots, broken oars, and gear of foreign dead men. And the river likewise is choked "with its cargo of dead Negroes, cows and chicken coops." No purity here—"no end to the withering of withered flowers." But time that destroys also preserves; every detail of the pattern is ambivalent; even Adam's lust is seen in contrary perspectives, as "the bitter apple and the bite in the apple." And as a special symbol of permanence in the midst of change there is "the ragged rock in the restless waters," washed by waves, concealed by fogs, a monument on halcyon days, a sea-mark in navigable weather, "but in the sombre season / Or the sudden fury, is what it always was." Whether by intention or accident this last phrase translates literally Aristotle's idiom for *unchanging essence, to ti ên einai*.

Part III of *The Dry Salvages* begins with mention of Krishna, and thereby illumines an important trans-Christian aspect of the philosophy of all three poems. The doctrine of Sankhya-Yoga, which Krishna embodied as a charioteer, expounds to the young Prince Arjuna in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, contains not only ideas but also specific symbols that are important to these poems. The darkness symbol:

"That which is night to all things, therein the self-subjugated remains awake; and in that where all beings are awake, that is night for the knower of the self." (II, 69. Paramananda's translation, modified.)

### Contending phases of the sea symbol:

"The mind that yields to the uncontrolled and wandering senses lets its wisdom float adrift as a boat on water is borne away by wind." (II, 67.) And: "As the ocean remains calm and unaltered though the waters flow into it, so a self-controlled saint remains unmoved when desires enter into him." (II, 70.)—a secondary, gracenote meaning of Eliot's sea symbol, I think.

Certain of Krishna's teachings about the nature of the transition called death are used by Eliot with striking subtlety. Krishna's words are these:

"He who, at the time of death, thinking of Me alone, goes forth, leaving the body, he attains unto My being. Have no doubt of this.

"O Arjuna, whatever state of being one dwells upon in the end, at the time of leaving the body, that alone he attains, because of his constant thought of that state of being. . . .

"The majority of beings, coming into birth again and again, merge helplessly into the Unmanifested at the approach of night and become re-manifest at the approach of day.

"But beyond this Unmanifested there is another Unmanifested, which is eternally existent and is not destroyed even when all beings are destroyed." (VIII, 5-6, 19-20.)

I should like to translate "Unmanifested" as also "Darkness." Eliot's restatement, which at one point becomes literal translation, may be compared:

At the moment which is not of action or inaction  
You can receive this: 'on whatever sphere of being  
The mind of a man may be intent  
At the time of death'—that is the one action  
(And the time of death is every moment)  
Which shall fructify in the lives of others:  
And do not think of the fruit of action.  
Fare forward.

In Eliot's version the emphasis shifts away from the Hindu idea of a sequence of definite incarnations determined by the law of *karma*; the parenthesized qualification is a reminder of the Heraclitean remark that "you cannot step twice into the same river, for other and yet other waters are ever flowing on." Each moment is a dying and therefore (since time is never finished) always *in some sense* a rebirth. "Fire lives in the death of air, and air in the death of fire; water lives in the death of earth, and earth in the death of water." Life and death, to Heraclitus' vision, are opposite but logically inextricable sides of every phenomenon, like up and down, convex and concave—an observation developed in Plato's *Phaedo*, with dubious validity, into a proof of immortality. But life and birth in this general sense have no distinctive relation to the human spirit. They describe simply the brute fact of temporal existence. What matters is the *quality* of rebirth, the

degree to which one "attains unto My being" as Krishna has said. Eliot's sure "catalytic" instinct here, furnishing the main philosophical theme of the poem, has been to synthesize the Hindu idea of qualitative rebirth through self-disciplined and reverent concentration upon "the Unmanifested beyond the Unmanifested" (i.e., the Dark that is sought by the devoted soul, not merely the darkness of the weary round of time) with Heraclitus' idea of the relevance of rebirth to every temporal moment. Since the future like the past is an imaginative construction and only the present is actual, an incessantly moving *now*, rebirth must be an experience of the *now*—not a future hope but a present embarkation, a resolute "faring forward."

But there is danger in seafare: remember the watery deaths of Phlebas the Phoenician. Part IV is, suitably therefore, a prayer.

Lady, whose shrine stands on the promontory,  
Pray for all those who are in ships, those  
Whose business has to do with fish . . .

This is she who "walked between the violet and the violet"—at once the "figlia del suo figlia, Queen of Heaven" and one's earthly intercessor and means of salvation found wherever the spirit can know and choose her. The fisher symbol stirs memories of the Fisher King, the public bar "where fishmen lounge at noon" neighboring the almost hidden white and gold splendor of Magnus Martyr, and—as in all Eliot's uses of this symbol, evidently—*Matthew* 4:19.

The final section of the poem is probably Eliot's most positive affirmation of life, and of the right way of life. There is recapitulation: the unceasing round of everyday events inflated with a specious importance ("Pastimes and drugs, and features of the press"), and the moment in the rosegarden, now perceived as no more than

The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight.

But the concluding emphasis is upon right action, independent of "fruits" and freed thereby of servitude to past and future. An unrealizable aim, but its unrealizability does not imply defeat.

We, content at the last  
If our temporal reversion nourish  
(Not too far from the yew-tree)  
The life of significant soil.

The yew-tree (Eliot's familiar death-symbol) is always nearby.  
We cannot, nor will any theology Hindu or Christian persuade  
us that we can, uproot it. But at least we can and should cultivate  
and set in order the lands on which it grows.

## The Zoo

*By Arthur Blair*



In the zoo no unicorn  
To bait the lion's brittle palate

Foster-father screens the flock  
In wanton ribaldry

In the zoo no splendid dish  
Of spleen to climb rheumatic ribs

Esoteric humor slides  
From dull metallic claws

In the zoo none dares concede  
Space of act to speech

Eyes confirm in scrutiny  
Bending light's caress

In the zoo harmonic fate  
Resolves melodic empathy

The unicorn's chromatic chords  
Are splintered on romantic lies

# The Matinee Mind

*By Eve Merriam*



Othello-throttle alarm's brazen clang.  
Reluctant foot yawns to freezing floor,  
put-puts on rug for warm arm of slipper.  
Prayer-rote teeth, darned stockings, toast-crunch.  
Turnstile. Timeclock. Typewriter. Takealetter.

And all the while her intimate whispering twin,  
the floating mind, bobs miles and miles away.  
Is Millicent Maribou, the lolling chaise-longue lovely.  
Lipstick, Marie. And my cuddly Pomeranian.  
My advertisements to endorse. My ninety-odd  
requests to adorn the Yale Junior Prom.

Do not sneer at typist's bon-bon brain, Professor.  
You have your lurid pulp-plot, too,  
your Wednesday-matinee mentality.  
Students suddenly flock from varsity cheering field  
to vocalize Latin verbs, your lucid lectures  
make Virgil sought-after as Valentino.  
Your shabby briefcase climbs scholastic cliffs.  
Alpine honors. The appointed chair. The more-than-  
adequate pension.  
Cream-bland country retreat. Your manuscript on  
Maecenas.

For all of us: pimply-faced shipping clerk  
with Saturday-night suit draped a la Hollywood,  
Negro woman naming her baby Franklin D.,  
my lover and I planning improbably on peace:  
make for the daily documentary mirror,  
screw ostrich-shut our eyes and scream *You dirty liar!*

# Four Poems

*By June Cannan*



## I

Having ripped the orange with the teeth  
And run the barefoot course—now the fern  
Is plucked and tainted on the sill; ants  
Will scale the painted bricks, devour it:—

Here is September come again, the perennial  
Remembered again abstractly, defensively:  
The tone, the print, the tinted page, the gallery—  
All come again now the sycamore is red:  
The hardy dying gaudy and the natural gaudy  
Dead: the orange rotten in its rusty skin.

Employ in September the pale and sectional—  
Elodea, choose hydra from the stream;  
Feeling spins a white-wash on the walls  
For winter: and now is the artificial art  
Most actual, the poet's moment most oblique—  
Whose death is not the season's awful turning,  
Whose death-approaching second, crumpled, climbing,  
Is final death accepted, understood.

## II

Obstinate she stood to ape the heavy bear:  
Either flesh, or faceless eye; either flare  
To rip the insect wings, or, dissolved, a rare  
Misshapen light, endeavoring to steal or share  
The creenings of the night birds crowded by his lair:  
Obstinate she stood—but turned—and now compare

How traitorous she grew and let the hardening air  
Turn liquified intestines into savoir-faire . . .  
How traitorous she grew and let the womb, a pear,  
Shrink into a finitude of dried fruit, where,  
Contemplative and caught, she stood in caution,—bare  
But with gelatinous covering and well-combed hair.

### I I I

They are not cracked and crumpling, blown away  
Down the desert, hardening into stones;  
They are the beasts whose hunger has not wasted,  
But distended their flesh and softened their bones . . .

But there is more to take from them than terror,  
Turning nauseous, turning away; slaves  
In galleys, or free in a stagnant ocean, send us  
More than terror from either of their graves:—

Gibbering in a polyglot of language—  
From the box, or dissolving on the sea-plain—  
The bound, the unconfined, the same, are locked  
In backward logic; they ask us to explain

Their deaths, and we attempt, invent, invert  
Our answers hopelessly, expulse our cords  
Of balance, wait, until we, infected, soon  
Lower ourselves into their wriggling hoards:—

(Upon the eye befalls disintegration:  
Among the flowers sheep with matted fleece  
Lie undevoured; and on the sunlit sea  
Float whales in darkened ambergris.)

## I V

Some of us have toppled off the precipice in reaching—  
And lie on holidays beneath a stranger's Christmas tree,  
Drunk and gibbering about a bomb concealed as a gift;

Some of us have toppled quietly, quietly, in reaching—  
And walk or sit chaperoned by a bareboned sister who supplies  
A purple 'kerchief, takes our hand, and tells us where to spit;

Some of us are toppling, only toppling—hesitating  
At the letter box, the telephone booth, having written  
Three pages to a calculating one, having called too soon;

Or encased in love's emulsion, fight's compulsion, in our own  
Personae fixed and tight—even in the wealthy arms  
Of all of them at night, we pause, and stare at the wall,  
reaching.

# THE FLOWERS

*By Elaine S. Gottlieb*



## PART ONE

IT WAS A damp day, but spring all the same. We could smell warmth from the sidewalks, and the drizzle seemed considerate; it barely touched us. Worms lay in pink coils, like odalisques, upon the walks. It was strange to realize that they came from the earth, that earth hung beneath these pavements, that we had only to murder concrete, to bomb brick and stucco, and we would find ourselves walking on earth, beneath the sky.

Yet the rain frightened us, like too sudden a caress. We sought shelter in a store when the downpour became heavier. From a dry corridor, we watched others rush by in the streets, their necks pulled into their collars.

As we watched rain pocking the sidewalks, we too, though we had sensed spring in the air, began to feel convinced that rain was rain. It would be naive to imagine it as anything else. As we regarded the feet and the pocks, the hurry of the first, the grey-ness of the other, we too, like those diffident pedestrians, began to look toward the weather as inimical and our corridor as escape.

What was this love that had started to emerge from us? Had we begun to remember ourselves at eighteen, when, with college friends, we ran bareheaded, barefoot, through a storm?

We must dismiss that love before it grabbed too much of our essence. We must define ourselves from the earth that would dispel us.

This rain made our head ache. We did not want it to penetrate the soles of our shoes, nor could we bear having it touch our garments, lest they be stained.

Finally, the rain subsided. We came out, blinking. But the day was still sullen, though an insidious warmth continued to arise from streets, to descend from a shifting sky. The curling ends of your hair became loose and hung lethargically over your collar, and when you caught sight of yourself in a store window, you were surprised to discover the paleness, even upon your lips, but you were even more surprised to discover that you were young.

Who is this young person? you asked yourself: Is she the kind who is loved? And then you turned from mirrors, store windows. They were all treacherous, they told you nothing. They would only delude you, making you ponder: Am I pretty? Do I dress well?

When you rode home in the subway, you were grateful that the train was too crowded for anyone to see you. And even if they did, they would be much too weary to judge you, would much prefer suspending themselves in book or paper, or in the pale land of their minds.

We arrive at our station. Walking home, we pass a man selling daffodils and roses. His cart of flowers in the dull street is unexpectedly bright. It seems like something illuminated on a stage. We grow suspicious. We think we are being fooled. Could this possibly be yellow, and is that pink? As we walk by, he comes running alongside us, but there is no need to start; he is only running to the window of an automobile whose occupants have summoned him. His hands flaunt two bouquets of roses. He seems flustered, anxious to please. He is a middle-aged man in a derby. At first he looked like anyone, not like a flower-vendor, perhaps like a man who could step down Fifth Avenue with paunch and blond mistress intact. But now we realize: it is he, actually, who sells flowers. Veneration explodes through us toward this sober man who sells flowers while wearing a derby.

Halfway up the block we pause, still impressed by the man's respectability and his irregularity because of it. And all at once we love him. We must return to purchase a bouquet. "For Grandma," you remind yourself. And we turn toward him devotedly, as though waiting for a curtain to part.

The man has a kind, honorable face. He is like a doorman or a waiter, with whom we would feel perfectly safe, in whose care we could see ourselves led languorously anywhere.

From him we purchase six roses and a dozen doffodils, which he protects with many ferns, twisting green wrapping paper into a cornucopia about them. He smiles, but not too intimately, takes our change decorously, and is so reserved, so dignified; he seems on the verge of bowing to us in farewell.

We nuzzle our face in the green cornucopia, and the mossy damp scent that meets us pierces us like love. We inhale more deeply this love that is between us and the flower vendor. It comes up spicy and strong. We cannot inhale enough.

When we reach home, we arrange the flowers in a vase. We run upstairs with them, to Grandma's room. Look! we exclaim. The flowers seem consecrated. We can say no more than: Look!

Grandma's little eyes turn towards us slowly. She is wearing a light blue robe, and her face is pink. She does not look ill, but she looks tired or empty, like a speaker who sits down after saying all he can. When we ask: How do you feel? She answers: Like a rotten potato.

But there is nothing pert in her eyes, no sauciness about her mouth. She, the vaudevillean, the tomboy, the never-old (who says the kitchen clock repeats: Faker, Fak-er) is all languid now, though a funny embarrassed smile, like that of a prankster who has been tripped by someone else's prank, distorts her lips.

We are hesitant now about chucking her on the cheek, for she is no longer a playmate, but someone grown up out of our area of indignity.

We place the flowers on a small table near her.

She raises herself and leans toward the vase.

Do you want to smell them? we ask eagerly, jumping to place the vase near her pillow. She clasps it to her breast and sinks her hot face into the cool scent.

Then her face is out of the vase, shy and vacant as before. We leap to retrieve the vase, fearing its weight might weary her, or that the water might spill. Again we place the vase on the table

and move it closer to her. For an instant we turn away. When we glance back at her, she is raising herself on an elbow again, toward the flowers, and lifting an arm, selecting a rose from among them.

We watch without motion or comment as she dissolves into the pillow and carries the rose with her, giving it to her nostrils, closing her eyes, surrendering to fecundity, resembling a child who has fallen asleep clutching the hand of its mother.

## PART TWO

Wistaria was a web to catch your youth. You could see your youth suspended in wistaria vines year after year. Each May, when wistaria bloomed, you would walk drowsily out of the house, and find yourself quite naturally without substance. What was essentially you dangled from the vines around the porch. And you never tried to tear the wistaria down, to get at yourself again, for you knew it would have been useless; you had to endure this enchantment.

But sometimes, at night, you would run wildly through the garden, searching for lost strength, unable to believe that those violet ruffles, that urgent sweetness, were you. And night widened beneath your longing and you could no longer find yourself; but once by moonlight you saw your spirit strangled on wistaria vines, and then you accepted the fact: I am extinct.

Autumn cast you back to yourself, a wretched thing. In winter you were clear as an icicle again and trying to sing: I am alone, I am strong.

And then the little drama of wistaria would begin once more, florets blooming like love blooming, slowly, then immoderately. You would be on the porch with Grandma, both of you unable to believe that wistaria had bloomed again, and both of you seeing Youth in the vines, but for you it was the future, and for Grandma, the past.

Grandma would say: Don't pick them yet! Wait!

And you would say: May I run around without shoes?

But here comes another May. As in a movie, you are magically grown up. You have been away from home, in the west, having worked there. You know what it means to meet each morning with dread, inquiring: How much do you want today?

You know, in other words, that your life can be discovered only if you pay admission. It is as if your life did not belong to you but to everyone else, and you had to ask many permissions in order to watch it perform.

With a light coat slung over your arm, carrying a light suitcase, you walk slowly toward the house. No, it is nothing you can rush upon. You must absorb your early youth again, feeling: It is I, walking on this street. Only you do not know if it is you now or you at eight or fourteen who walks toward the house, through heat.

You walk through it as through an airless room in which everyone has been weeping. The sun is naked, the sky too blue. Your heart beats heavily, you feel enclosed. A bird you cannot see drops tremolos into the pockets of your mind.

When you come to the house and see the wooden door flung back and the screen door in its place, you think: How strange that I should be able as always to walk up those steps toward the door and knock upon the side of the door, to release the latch inside, and then enter and be among familiar scents in the hall, and then go upstairs to my room.

Reticently, you approach, yourself a memory growing more distinct. Like certain old ladies, who, sitting by upstairs windows, silently await twilight, trying to understand it, sit abstracted, listening to music. To yourself you become only as real as a returning memory, the sense of past action and emotion very strong, but you are not the person who approaches this house, though you know her well.

The house is still, but the garden seems disturbed. You realize through your dream that gardeners have been there recently. The scent of newly turned earth is vivid to your nostrils.

Then you are on the porch, thinking: Perhaps Grandma is on the side porch. You turn to see.

Staring out at the garden . . . the short, full form. Her back, over which is stretched blue and white checked gingham. Leaning against a porch post . . . her flabby, freckled arm, her small, bark-colored head. Sunlight and the shadows of leaves speckle her neck, her arms, her dress.

She is staring at the garden.

And suddenly we know: That is wrong. No one, standing there before, could stare at the garden. We do not wonder: What does she see? We only know she sees; that is it, and she should not. Wistaria should prevent it.

Terrified, we glance about. We see the vines lop-sided, hacked unevenly, here and there a pallid wistaria hanging down. It seems to us that the porch, the garden, reek of murder.

For a moment we want to turn away, to run down those steps and back to the west where we can remember the past as something indestructible. Here we have returned to our childhood, and it is making a face, making a grin that stretches too wide. And now our childhood splits apart, the present enters into it. And our childhood becomes nothing.

But just as we would return to the west, to the unsaid future, Grandma turns about. Her joy, tumbling out of discouragement, reaches forward and halts us. She gives a short, grateful cry. We run to her. She hugs us and will not let us go, and kisses us, forgetting the heat.

You are back again! She cries, Back again! my baby . . . and we sense tears. My baby! she purrs again, so contentedly, and we do not know whether it is us or the wistaria she means. Whether we had been cut off and now the wistaria were growing again, or whether the wistaria was her youth and now it is once more before her, and the days, once more, are long.

It is a little while later that we learn how the gardener's man, who had never before seen wistaria, had mistaken the vines for something overgrown, and had cut away happily, as he might bob branches of Bridal Veil bush, or American Beauty.

## PART THREE

It was last year, the year of the hurricane, that our other grandmother, our father's mother, died. While we were out west she died, as though playing a trick on us, or hide-and-seek, knowing all the time: You can't touch me. You can't find me.

The day after you returned home, you walked to your grandmother's house, four blocks away, another large house with another large garden. And faced her death.

It was something you could never quite believe. You hadn't seen it happen. Walking toward her house, which had been so much of a refuge, so diverting, you expected to see her hand flutter at the window, or else you expected her to be fondling the rhododendron bush whose flowers bloomed large, a shimmering lavender.

Or you foresaw her among the pink roses or the white roses, or else watching the vegetable patch, or looking for peaches among the peach blossoms, or apricots among the apricot blossoms. You forgot which flowers bloomed in which month and all the blooms ran together, about Grandma's face and broad shoulders, and she, moving in them, became as promising as they, and her eyes and mouth were in love with them, and her gnarled hand stroked them gently.

When Grandma smiled and took you to her breast, her eyes seemed to be crying, but weren't. You only imagined so. And it was always surprising, when she clasped you, to discover that she teetered, that she was so much more fragile than she looked, with her broad shoulders. Then you would let her go quickly, replacing her among the flowers or among the pots of jam she was brewing, as though she were a few months old baby, in fear lest she break.

On Grandma's block there was a boy, Edmund, whom you had loved all your childhood, up to and past your eighteenth year. He would come to the hedge around Grandma's garden, and you, knowing he would come, and having run into the garden in anticipation, would rush to the hedge and speak to him and laugh

with him, both your faces close and warm together, nothing existing between, only the leaves rustling overhead, like mothers urging: Sh . . . Sh . . . over cradles.

Then you would run, burning, to Grandma, and explain: Edmund wants me to take a walk with him. Do you mind? And in your delirium and embarrassment you would thrust into her lap a handful of currants you had picked. Kissing her flaccid face hastily, you would rush toward him, carrying with you her indulgent smile and her black-bright eyes that were banked in creases.

But the next moment you would have forgotten everything as you walked with Edmund to the park. Afterwards, he would accompany you home, and, standing on the stoop, you would wriggle through the arms of wistaria vine, plucking for him a few flowers that were still damp and sweet from rain. Raindrops would sprinkle over your hair and face and arms. You would chuckle. But you would extend your arm toward him, holding the flowers steadily, lest blossoms scatter. "For your mother!" you would say. But you meant: Here's a kiss.

And now you have come to the garden again. You glance up toward her room. Then you lower your head in shame, for of course she isn't there. You can't sit on the footstool, while she, on the hand-carved rocking chair, in sunlight, tells the legends of her youth, of her piano playing, of the cousins who duelled for her, though she took neither of them. You can't run, at her direction, to the dresser, and, opening a drawer, select from old, soft petticoats, an ancient book, a bound volume of Addison and Steele's *Spectator*, and sitting beside her, hear again how another admirer gave her this.

No, she will relate no more stories when you have run there after some quarrel. Nor will she ever wonder again, innocently, without pathos: What will my grandchildren become? And never again will she feed you quince or apricot preserves and milk, and tell you about your father when you are despondent or full of longing.

Even the large peach tree is gone, having been blown down

by the hurricane. Grandma, your youth, the peach tree, and your love . . . all blown down and used as firewood.

We walk toward the house that we knew so well, every room distinct before us . . . one sunlit, another dismal, one warm, another chilly. And Grandma spreading a blanket over you when you fell asleep on the couch in the "little room."

The living room is a place in your mind. The untuned piano shoots broken music through your veins. Paintings that were hung there are suspended from your organs. From a vital place within you there is a twitch, and you know: Someone is trying to pull this thing away, to tear it out soaking.

And then there swarms over us a slow smell, as of ether; we grow sick with it and wish to break away, but we are overcome by a dream of horror.

We see boys walking through the house, we feel them walking through us, we smell their degeneracy. We remember the gang of boys that had ransacked Grandma's house shortly after her death. The dust from their shoes blows through us, chokes us. We spit up their stains and are retched by the knowledge of their hands.

Let them steal some money! It does not matter if they want only money. We would spill open the safe for them. Only they must keep away from this house.

Yet they have entered it, blasphemed it, breathed on it, ransacked it.

So the peach tree fell. And she, searching for it from her window and not finding it, survived the hurricane, but not for long, and fell, like the tree, her blossoms, devastated, and said in half-sleep: He is standing before me now. Daddy says it's time for me to go. And went.

Then the boys came.

Then the relatives came, debasing the house further, stripping the living room walls of paintings, ripping up rugs, carting away the bed, the dressers, the bric-a-brac collected on a world tour by her brother who was an actor. Everything disappeared. No more couch in the parlor. No more table in the dining room. No

more chrysanthemums on the cabinet near her bed, no more tulips in the dining room and living room and bedroom. No more roses, lilies of the valley, asters, poppies, about the house. Nothing. The house is dead.

And now new people move in, renting a room at a time. And take a window and build a pantry around it, and take the cellar door and build a shanty outside it, and tear open the hedges so that they may run an automobile into the garden, for Grandma never had a garage, and the currant bushes don't matter to them.

And you feel: Only the stairs are left.

You walk by the house in May. You look up at the tortured house and the windows hung with alien curtains. The rhododendron bush is tipsy and scarred. The rustic bench, the steamer chairs in which your family sat in the shade each summer and laughed and ate ice cream, are gone. The little peach tree you planted when your father was alive has disappeared.

Beloved faces step before us, but then there is a clatter, like someone trying to get a tune out of an old piano, and we want to run away from this street, this corner. If only we had left nothing here, had loved nothing here!

It is wrong to love, for everything you love shall be taken away. Spring is an enemy; do not let it come too close. And fear summer most of all. Never abandon yourself. Never lie down on the earth; it would quake, it would demolish you. Strike before you are stricken and injure before you are harmed. For life is entirely destructive, and love is the first step toward being destroyed.

This we learned in May, in tranquil weather, when new leaves and new scents and pastel flowers sought, as always, to seduce us, as we walked up and down and passed an old house, and trod upon our youth, grinding it away, forever.

# All Over the Circus Floor

*By Clark Mills*



ALL OVER THE CIRCUS FLOOR,

the algebra of strife and accident,  
tongues and economies at war with one another, and the issue  
veiled in a wilderness of factors:

the shot hand  
gone from the stunned white arm; the lucky bomb-hit;  
the treaty signed at the last moment, or not signed;  
the crew, heroic but anonymous,  
drowned south of Iceland; and the weather.

In their cages,  
slowly, the starved imprisoned countries die.  
The diplomats move down. The generals move up,  
into the floodlights. And the armies walk  
towards the same spot. They do not speak.

And from the ether  
a thousand voices in a hundred tongues cry, This is  
the truth, the only truth, tune out the others.

This is the spectacle, or part of it. The whole  
towers above the tired performers  
who act and stare, and over the tired audience  
that stares and acts, and over all, who cling to private hopes  
and see but cannot feel  
or feel but cannot understand  
the bolt and flash of multiple event.

Some ask with sudden panic in their voices,  
What happens next? What now? Is this the program?—  
and discover

the spectacle was not rehearsed, and now progresses  
catch as catch can, the devil take the hindmost,  
God help us all—the lights do not go out,  
the action does not end, the fretful child that cries,  
O father, take me home, will not go home:

endless outside the canvas, the galactic cold.

—And from all places, the faint voices,  
the small, weak voices of the crazed, the torn,  
the child blown into crimson mist, the seaman drowned,  
the unconsolated young wife of the charred pilot  
crying, crying  
for the destruction of the lunacy of money,  
for the destruction of the ignoble rites of race,  
for the destruction of the interests, grown fat  
through bribes and cunning, power multiplying power  
in the dead mansions and dishonored capitols

—lost voices, crying  
for the destruction of the walls that separate  
island from continent, the living from the living, man from man.

Soon, soon, in this fifth decade of the burning century,  
after the wane of sorrow, and the slow ebb of communal hatred,  
grant this in part, O balances and permutations—  
not in bereavement, not in fire, but in simple  
festival and thanksgiving, as the people, drunk on language,  
shout, *Welcome, welcome*, in a hundred tongues,  
and as the visionary cries, *The sun*  
*is dazzling on a countryside without horizons.*  
*Oh here the green republic of our species*  
*bursts into life and flourishes forever.*

# Dean Swift

*By Joseph Bennett*



## I

What breath he shed and what outrageous toil  
Rocked in his down-shrunken head  
Flints its edge above the scalding boil,  
The pits and flaming gneiss: his body-bed.  
Thus all that fools can screech and breed below  
Hammers tremulant in him and swells  
His regent cord with mire-mad sinew flow,  
Rage-envy of such vicious human cells.  
His insanity was such that could  
Not bear the labor of its flesh nor toy  
With those extreme desires that cursed his food  
With blasphemous self-love; and all his joy  
Grew in some wild uttering which bled  
His grief and what pursuing peace he fled.

## II

Swift, that turned his mother for a snake,  
Ran along a peasant road and topped  
A damsel in the field. He rose to shake  
His miry locks; he kicked her as she flopped.

Swift, that sold his sister for a groat,  
Wandered roaring through the night. Behind him  
Homesteads blazed, and from his broken throat  
Caroling were whimpers; tears were dim.

Swift, that ate his children two by two,  
Cursed the people from his door. Their young  
He roasted while he wept and prayed and chewed  
The coals, the tiny bones that pierced his tongue.

Sinewy Swift, that shook his body mad,  
So hated incarnation that he drew on it  
For pain enough to drive his spirit glad  
With carious mortality of wit.

### I I I

Down the marsh there rips a ragged river;  
Windback ridges prance along its race.  
Fireglow stains its glinting waves dark-red  
Where waters fissure from their spouting-base.

Pale Jonathan went riderless into the storm:  
No elf to sit and hold his driving mane,  
No Irishman to pull his struggling hoof-weight  
By the nose; for he at Dunsinane

Was shod, and trained his furious mouth within  
No bridle of the rich, but clamped his teeth  
Upon the flesh of mares and rent such tendons  
As he craved. He fed on terror's skin

Who walked in that flamboyant sea where breath  
And waving night congressed with flaming hair,  
The while he lashed in gales and gusty brine  
Sea-devils dancing on their naked spine.

# On Waking Up At Night

*By Oscar Williams*



The midnight stands in blue and iron around the house,  
The mountainous dynamos of stillness throbbing in the brain,  
The subconscious with windows dark like a factory  
Hears in the next room the refrigerator swallowing itself—

And the nightlight sending the lank shanks of the lamp  
Like scaffolding drawn to no scale on the ceiling's sierras,  
Till all the days furniture is gigantic in the mind  
And the walls stand together in a great crusade of silence.

Whose head is this waking upon the warm pillow to peril,  
In a stone night awakened by the propellers' bellowing?  
The plane shakes the curtains of dancing tons of overhead,  
The sleepless century is chasing murderers through clouds.

These eyes open wide on the midnight as though at their birth,  
Blown open by the thunderclap of some collapse in importance  
Pour from the buoyed head nesting on night's delinquencies  
The questions, where am I, what day is it tomorrow?

One remembers it is the region somehow near Christmas  
And hears again Santa Claus shrieking, holding his sides  
In a shop window, and bells with stilts on their elbows,  
The private public walking the waters of bubbling ornaments.

Or one sees the airless past lying in hills of moonlight  
And all one's deeds like statues in the halls outside;  
The dust of a lifetime too heavy to settle down drifts by  
Enfolding in the dark the knees of objects and ideals.

The nightlight struggling through clouded sums of values,  
Lighting the alleys for the cat-eye of the wily average  
Celebrates the spritely kingdom of hallucination,  
Burns against walls its flares of no known definitions.

But it is no thief with wire arms or glass mask of childhood  
Climbing through the deep-blue windows and romantic stageset,  
Only the self caught red-handed on the backstairs of the past  
As the lamp's spindle flies its impending gallows on the future.

## About The Contributors



PHILIP WHEELWRIGHT teaches philosophy at Dartmouth. In the thirties he edited *The Symposium* with James Burnham. He is a frequent contributor to *The Kenyon Review*. ☆ OSCAR WILLIAMS edited the two New Verse anthologies. He has appeared in *Poetry*, *Nation*, and other magazines. ☆ EVE MERRIAM has conducted a program on modern poetry over WQXR. She has contributed frequently to the *New Republic*, *Partisan Review*, and others. ☆ ARTHUR BLAIR is the editor of *Diogenes*. ☆ MILTON KLONSKY is a poet in his early twenties who once had a poem published in *The Congressional Record* as support of the Ludlow Amendment for a referendum before declaring war. He expects to enter the army shortly. ☆ MAURICE CRAMER is the author of *Phoenix at East Hadley*. He has joined the English Department at Princeton. ☆ F. R. B. GODOLPHIN edited the recent Random House publication, *The Greek Historians*. ☆ CARLOS BAKER edited *American Issues* with Thorp and Curti. ☆ F. CUDWORTH FLINT teaches English at Dartmouth. He has contributed to the *Southern Review*. ☆ JOHN WACHOB is a student at Princeton. ☆ CLARK MILLS is on the Department of Romance Languages at Cornell. He appeared in the *New Directions* series of younger poets, and his recent *Suite for France* was printed by the James Decker Press. ☆ JUNE CANNAN is a student at Barnard College. ☆ ARTHUR MIZENER is now with the English Department of Rochester University. He has appeared in *The Kenyon Review*. ☆ JOSEPH BENNETT has appeared in Allen Tate's recent anthology, *Princeton Verse Between Two Wars*. ☆ ELAINE GOTTLIEB has appeared in *Decisions*.

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Ruins and Visions* (Poems 1934-1942): STEPHEN SPENDER.  
Random House.

When Mr. Spender's first book of poems appeared in England in 1933, that kind of rough-and-ready critic who writes short reviews such as this one might have summarized Spender as "mood, Wilfred Owen; doctrine, Communist; diction, Shelley; rhythm, Whitman." This pigeon-holing is of course in part untrue of each single poem, and as a whole imperceptively blunt about the general body of this early poetry. Owen pitied the wreckage of war; Spender, the wreckage of peace.\* Orthodox communism is motivated by a passionately social economics; Spender's was by a passionately social but frustrated individuality. Both Shelley's and Spender's imagery was characteristically rapid, bright, quivering, evanescent; but Spender was born too late to light his way out of civilization with a star; for him, the new day's dawn will "explode like a shell." Finally, Whitman's rhythms, when he did not collapse into cataloguing, were typically fluent and spacious, whereas Spender's were molecular and nervous.

In this new book of shorter poems—the Random House edition really consists of two books bound together, since over half the volume appeared separately in England in 1939 under the title *The Still Centre*—the signs of change compel a new summary. We might say, "mood, Hamlet; doctrine, self-integration; diction, within hailing distance of both T. S. Eliot and more especially Auden; rhythms, in general tighter because of the stricter verse forms." And we should add a new item: "technique, considerable use of rhymes and assonances in the tradition popularized by Wilfred Owen." Which brings us curiously within sight of our first starting point.

Some of the differences—particularly in form—are simply nowadays "in the air." It is difficult for any sensitive and literate poet today to keep entirely clear of such lamenting echoes of *The Waste Land* as

There is never enough air  
There is never a wide enough space  
There is never a white enough light

and so on. And almost the standard medium of the Audenish thirties has been a vocabulary in which the main line of connection is woven of fairly abstract, semi-psychological terms, baited at intervals with bits of concrete imagery. As for the more regular metrical patterns and the assonantal schemes Spender more frequently employs, these too might possibly be due in part to the influence of Auden. More likely, however, they embody Spender's reaction against the temptations inherent in his freer rhythms—temptations harped on by his earlier

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\* The Spanish Civil War furnished Spender with situations nearly identical with those Owen wrote of, and one section of *Ruins and Visions* shows that Spender's presentation of such scenes closely parallels Owen's.

critics. Too often a longish line of free verse dies away weakly in order that the next line may begin vigorously with a word emphasized by being removed the width of a page from the preceding words with which it belongs. But Spender is now cutting down his line-lengths, in some lines so much as to make them coincide with the brief bursts of phrasing which are the "molecules" I mentioned. He is cutting his lines to fit their energy.

But none of these changes are rooted simply in imitation. The change in diction, for example, arises partly from the fact that Spender now feels it more necessary to think with his thoughts. Formerly he more often thought with his intuitions. To me the most successful poems he has yet written seem to be those which contain the largest proportion of interior progress by means of such spiritual tactility. Still, it may be that for a problem so urgent and inclusive as his, a solution can only be attained through use of all forms of symbolic strategy that are available. At any rate, it is now clear that what might have seemed to some readers a tangential theme in Spender's earlier work is actually the core of all his poetry. He is a poet obsessed (the word is not here depreciatory) with himself. For in himself he finds all those elements of dependency, of softness, of hesitation which move not only his pity but his aversion when he encounters them in others, and which, in hysterical attempts at "compensation," may break out upon the world as violence and rapine:

. . . our fear makes all its opposite.  
Your peace bursts into war.  
.....  
And when you choose a lover like a mirror  
You see yourself reflected as a gunman.

(Incidentally, in *Napoleon in 1814*, Spender presents a virtuoso sketch of Hamlet-Spender as King.) Spender's problem, then, is—how to create out of what he does not admire in himself that which is admirable? Or even, without seeking to destroy the perhaps indestructible qualities in himself that he distrusts, can he by being driven to acknowledge and declare these, find in them his strength? This problem is substantially that of most serious modern writers: how may they build for themselves a universe in which they as men and artists may live and create? But with a poet of Spender's temperament, a universe cannot be begun until an interior "still centre" is achieved; and once that center is attained, a universe crystalizes almost of itself around it.

Of course, Spender is not so circumstanced that his prime difficulty is to refrain from "bursting into war." His difficulty seems to be to "choose a lover." For he apparently believes that for him the route of the "still centre" lies through the

. . . . . mirror  
Of lips, where love at last finds peace  
Released from the will's error.

In Mr. Spender's first collection of poems, several of the lyrics of affection had a distinctly homosexual tinge. In the present book, there is testimony to the poet's release from any such impasse through love of a woman. But poems appear later in the book which indicate a rift between the two, and the woman's desertion of the poet for another lover. At the very end he seems again to have

found anchorage in love—this time, of “Natasha.” Is all this closely autobiographical? I cannot be certain. A more important question is, “Can one human being find his ‘still centre’ through some one other human being?” I suppose the answer is both “no” and “yes.” No, if that other human being remains for the seeker simply a human individual. Yes, if that human individual is so transformed through symbolic extension that mere flesh-and-blood acquaintanceship could no longer identify him—or more usually her. Nobody in Florence recognized Dante’s Beatrice except Dante.

Such poems as *The Uncreating Chaos, Darkness and Light, The Human Situation*, and *Variations on My Life* (there are two by this last title), which record the author’s wrestling with his problem, will chiefly interest most readers. But that is not to say that they are Spender’s most consistently sustained achievements. I still find most pleasure in those poems in which he evokes a remembered scene or incident or person, and allows the significance, the point, of the poem to remain dissolved in the aura of recollection surrounding the emotion. The elegiac-lyrical may be a minor mode of poetry, but in it Spender moves with greatest sureness. Both the imagery and the attitudes expressed in his poems of personal struggle are decidedly centrifugal, flying off in so many directions that the poem is likely to be integrated only by its topic, not by its effect. On the other hand, no doubt Spender’s route of advance to greater poetic achievement lies through, not around, his personal problem. And it is decidedly to his credit that he deals with this problem in the terms of the life actually around and in him as a human being in the twentieth century. He does not translate his problem into artificially remote terms, like the sweet, sad, and Elysianly dead language of an imaginary lad in an imaginary Shropshire. Poetry of that sort too readily becomes the kind of consolation we call a dissipation. Spender is trying to create for himself a morality through his art, instead, like Housman, of using his art to circumvent his morality. The intensity with which Spender has applied himself to this effort, although it causes the texture of his poetry to collapse in places under the strain (as, for example, in the curiously sadistic images that crop up startlingly here and there), nevertheless gives to this latest book a sense of direction. Here is a poet who, like another Bunyan, must get on with his pilgrimage from the City of Destruction—which, like the City of God, lies within. His example is on the whole salutary, and commands respect.

Meanwhile, where nothing’s pious  
And life\* no longer willed,  
Nor the human will conscious,  
Holy is lucidity  
And the mind that dare explain.

F. CUDWORTH FLINT

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\* Misprinted as “like” in American edition; I have restored the reading from the second English edition of *The Still Centre*.

*The Nature of Literature:* THOMAS CLARK POLLOCK. Princeton University Press.

In this book the writer attempts to bring his readers up to date in the well-known distinction between the language of science and the language of poetry, or rather the more general art of literature. He quite correctly points out that the language of science is the most essential tool of the scientific method. In an admirable chapter he traces the anthropology of language from the primitive culture characterized by its lack of signs for abstract distinctions, for example, the prepositions, which do not develop in a speech community whose members live in a common context. It is only with the development of absentee communication such as writing that complex and abstract signs, such as numbers and adjectives, prepositions, etc., develop; at this stage the writer must convey the context with his words which hitherto was the mutual environment to both writer and reader.

Modern semantical studies are the late flower of perennial science. So long as the meaning of a word depends entirely upon its context and the specific purpose of the person who uses it, science will be inexact. Only when we have limited each sign, or word, to refer to one and only one *referent* in all contexts can we have scientific knowledge. Further, we require that a word to be symbolic for scientific uses refer to some publicly experiencable object or phenomenon. Words of literature do not, however, stand in a one-to-one relation to their referents. Indeed in some abstract conceptions such as "beauty," "goodness," or "emotion" we are hard put to discover any public referent common to all. It is this fact that has led science to a scorn of literature: an assumption that the signs of poetry or literature refer to substantially nothing. The field of the controversy has been the word "truth." Science alone makes assertible descriptive statements capable of verification and hence, properly speaking, true or false. Much loose thinking has said that the essence of art (literature, particularly) is the interpretation of a subject matter, and that to do so it must make propositions open to truth or falsity. This in the mind of our author, however, is not the purpose and hence not the essence of literature. Literature is the expression and evocation of experience. Experience is not a word to stand for our generalizations from our particular experiences; it is the quality of the instant as we feel it *and* its particular content, or pattern of events. It is characterized by a kind of intensity which "boils" the ideas of the creative artist, and if he is successful, "boils" the feelings of his reader in some comparable way. Thus the essence of literature is seen to be the creation of experience, and this is its difference from science.

The author points out that his distinctions are in the line of succession from De Quincey's "language of knowledge" and "language of power." The similarity is swallowed up, however, in the wealth of psychological research which the author has included to demonstrate and refine his distinctions.

The footnotes indicate to the scholar of semantics such names as I. A. Richards, C. W. Morris, O. Jespersen; to the student of literature his examples from Conrad and Willa Cather will be significant. It should be stated that this book is not an original contribution, it is a summary for the layman in carefully developed steps of some of the presuppositions of the literary theorists of our time.

JOHN F. WACHOB

*The Classics and the Man of Letters:* T. S. ELIOT. Oxford University Press.

This brief address by Mr. Eliot was originally delivered to the English Classical Association, but most of what Mr. Eliot has to say is of the greatest concern not only to those who believe that literature is important but also, at least implicitly, to those determined to preserve civilization against barbarism.

In a brief review one can only note two or three points among the many illuminating suggestions, remarks, and questions compressed in a few pages. In the first place Eliot's defense of his term "man of letters" argues the importance of secondary writers in providing environment for great writers and in preserving the continuity necessary for great literature. The tendency to look only at the great writers may be the source of much nonsense in theorizing on the creation of literature. Eliot points out that although it is impossible to prescribe the necessary education for genius we may fail to realize the extent to which a Shakespeare may assimilate what he needs from his contemporaries, and may profit by the standards and values of his environment. Shakespeare's debt to the classical tradition was great because the men of letters of his day were so deeply imbued with it.

Another interesting point is that one function of training in the classics is that of keeping the individual in touch with a common cultural background. This in turn provides an avenue of communication for the artist who seeks a larger public than any coterie of admirers. This of course need not mean that he must rehandle old themes in traditional forms. English literary history is filled with the skeletons of "classical imitations," but it is possible for the writer to have ample freedom within a cultural tradition without being shackled by it. The classical tradition played a part in both Neo-classicism and Romanticism without being absorbed by either. In one way or another the classics also have resisted the pedants' efforts to appropriate them, and the best classical authors continue to be potent forces whenever and wherever human dignity and values are esteemed, whenever men believe it worth the effort to try to be civilized. This, as Eliot shows, is not to say that we can get along without science and without religious belief, but the classics may provide the cultural background and common basis of communication which enables the man of letters to find an audience for whom literature is a significant part of experience.

One form of barbarism attacking the traditions of our civilization is perfectly evident today and it is perhaps significant that one of its earlier manifestations was the Nazi assertion that Homer was a Jew, and the Nazi repudiation of our classical heritage along with the Christian tradition. Eliot points out that there is, however, another form of barbarism within England and America which may prove as harmful in the long run as Nazism. This consists of the group who want so new a world that its members would welcome a complete break with the traditions of the past. If Eliot is right, and I think he is, in arguing the need of a cultural unification that goes beyond the administrative and economic, and in believing that the new unity can only grow on the old roots, then literature can play an important part in the process and the classics are an essential part of our heritage. Eliot realizes that the difficulty of making the classics widely accessible remains, but he has shown that the need is great both for the creation of great literature and for the maintenance of the civilized tradition.

F. R. B. GODOLPHIN

*Fire and Ice: The Art and Thought of Robert Frost:* LAWRENCE THOMPSON. Henry Holt.

Most great poets either produce, or are, revolutions in themselves, and the necessary belief in their own integrity with which their personal revolutions are buttressed often brings them into conflict with their own generations. If Frost has had too wide a popular acceptance, and too grudging an admiration from the intellectuals, one reason is that neither extreme has known quite how to take him. Emerson's oracle said, "All things have two handles: beware of the wrong one." One of the solid virtues of Mr. Thompson's book (by all odds the sanest and soundest treatment of Frost to date) is that it gives us enough handles to Frost to make him comprehensible without insisting that we confine our grasp to any one area or any one dogma. But in demonstrating the value and variety of Frost's accomplishment up to and including *A Witness Tree*, Mr. Thompson has not yielded to the temptation, all too frequent among Frost's admirers, to make the poet a rock of poetical ages (New Hampshire granite) around whose sturdy base temporary-contemporary faddists perform limited and ephemeral experiments with paper bows, or run fools' errands after "new ways to be new," as the master had it. One is immediately prejudiced in Mr. Thompson's favor by the discovery that he has not flinched from admitting that the Rock, like other New England granite, has its faults: "cold flatness, prosaic lines, extrinsic moralizings, faulty ellipsis," simple obscurity and the perverse tendency to mingle the trivial with the weighty.

The Frost revolution has consisted in his discovery of old ways to be new: his reconciliation of the two rival sound-factors in poetry, the loose rhythm of the spoken sentence and the regular beat of meter; his treatment of metaphor ("that rational act of comparison which brings into focus some analogy to sharpen and clarify the apprehension" so that "at its best, the metaphor is the poem"); and, what is related to both the foregoing contributions, his revitalization of old, homely words by a shift of application, so that they light up newly, like the fire-log which looked dead until it was stirred. The hall-mark of his poetry, as of his personal philosophy, is a rational skepticism which has helped him to avoid the pat answer, the exclusive over-simplification, and the emotional attitudinizing of the youthful revolutionary. Frost has not formulated his æsthetic under one roof, but his scattered manifestoes, when they are finally collected and published, will reveal theories of language, form, substance, ear-sight, and metaphor, which together constitute a sufficiently revolutionary æsthetic to earn him a title which he has denied. It is no dispraise of Mr. Thompson's book to say that one of its foremost values is the quotations from Frost's prose which he has liberally introduced. Frost's æsthetic has the advantage over some other revolutionary credos that it is distilled from poetical experience; and his experience has the advantage that it has never been confined by his æsthetic, as Wordsworth's was for a time, or Lanier's all his writing life.

You get the impression from the book that Frost has taken the best from his predecessors and gone on independently from there. His tentative definition of poetry as a clarification of life places him in a general line of descent from men like Wordsworth and Emerson without imprisoning him there. His skepticism, his sense of ironic detachment, have a distinctly Arnoldian cast, though humor pulls him clear of Dover Beach pessimism, and equally from that high-

est peak of high seriousness where vegetation cannot flourish for the cold. Mr. Thompson pretty well proves that Frost has a strong bias toward the Emersonian æsthetic, which is still a very modern one. But Frost has little patience with the metaphysical absolutism which informs Emerson's theory of poetry; nor, by the same token, does he give a hoot for Wordsworthian pantheism; and he pays, of course, far more attention to form than either Wordsworth or Emerson was willing to do. The careless extravagance of much romantic poetry is as burdensome to him as the painfully labored conceits of the metaphysicals, or the quest of the quivering image among the super-æsthetes. The younger Frost had some of the first trouble, as the older Frost has some of the second, but by and large he has stood on middle ground. His natural reticence (in New England another name for good taste) has kept him from getting flashy, and made him content, not to insist and belabor, but to say and let be. Yet he has spoken with discipline. The analyses of Frost's poems with which Mr. Thompson illuminates his critique, are welcome evidence not only of how much profundity underlies Frost's apparent simplicity of expression and everydayness of phrase, but also of how much attention Frost has given to organic form through his often masterly handling of metaphor.

By stressing Frost's anti-romanticism, his common-sense rationalism, his distrust of metaphysical unknowns, his close knowledge of the ancients (especially Horace and Virgil), his emphasis on ethical values, and his position in the Golden Mean, Mr. Thompson implies, without I think explicitly committing himself to the term, that Frost shares many qualities with the neo-humanists. One fault with the book, largely a fault of emphasis, is that the author nowhere shows how Frost's humanism has limited his receptivity to the untried. Mr. Thompson is willing to admit certain technical deficiencies in Frost while demonstrating the extraordinary range of Frost's technical accomplishment. The case for Frost's critical and philosophical position would not have suffered unduly had the author lit into the poet a little more vigorously than he has done. At any rate, Frost's position is made clear enough so that the reader may judge it for himself, and perhaps we should ask no more. *We could* ask more of the preliminary historical chapter where, in his hasty passage through a hundred years of critical theory Mr. Thompson has trod on too many modern toes, though I should be ready to grant the author the main thesis of his synthesis: the bifurcation of poetical theory in America a century ago.

But I leave quibbling. The book is a sound treatment of a sound poet by a sound critic, who might have had time to chase out its few faults were he not now employed in the even more critical profession of chasing submarines. Lieutenant Thompson was not at sea when he wrote this book. His feet were on solid ground.

CARLOS BAKER

*American Harvest*, edited by ALLEN TATE and JOHN PEALE BISHOP. L. B. Fischer Publishing Corporation.

*American Harvest*, edited by Allen Tate and John Peale Bishop, is an attractive looking anthology of over five hundred pages devoted to "the work of the most significant writers of the last twenty years in the United States." It has been published in this country in English and simultaneously in Brazil in Portuguese and in Chile in Spanish, as an aspect of our Good Neighbor campaign under the sponsorship of the Office of Inter-American Affairs.

A South American would probably be glad to find that all sections of our country are represented, although he might be surprised that over one half of the writers are from our Southern states. If he had previously been fortunate enough to have read Oscar Cargill's *Intellectual America*, he would be gratified to discover examples of most of the literary schools there dissected: Primitivism, Naturalism, the Intelligentsia, and especially Decadence. He might well congratulate himself on having purchased an opportunity to run over the contemporary American mind.

Nevertheless an American, seeking to judge the impact of the book on a Brazilian or Chilean audience, might wonder whether it was really so full of variety as at first glance it seems. More than once as I read through the different stories and poems I found myself under the illusion that I was studying the works of one author. This illicit situation arose partly perhaps because many of the stories are written in the first person, but even more because of frequent similarities in tone, style, and point of view. Such an illusion is sometimes felt in anthologies, where often the selections seem to express the editor almost as much as they do the individual authors. *The Oxford Book of English Prose* impresses me as being full of quaint and gallantly patriotic prose, and I attribute this to certain qualities in the taste of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch. There is nothing quaint about *American Harvest*; the central quality here seems to me to be a dead-pan or poker-face toughness of style or levelness of tone, what a hostile critic might say was the sentimental affectation of trying to appear devoid of sentiment, of trying to have your penny and your whistle too with regard to the gentle emotions, as in the following passage:

"He waited a long time and said: 'It's time to die. Nobody loves me.' I tried to say, 'Grandpa, I love you.' And then I did say it all right, feeling like it hadn't been me said it, and knowing all of a sudden it was a lie, because I didn't feel anything. He just lay there; and I went downstairs."

Could *American Harvest* have been made to seem more brightly variegated? Willa Cather's impressive story of bitter frustration and ugliness in Kansas, *The Sculptor's Funeral*, is not remarkably different from such other stories of excellent though somewhat drab realism as Sherwood Anderson's *The Egg*, Ring Lardner's *The Haircut*, and Dos Passos' *Red, White and Blue Thanksgiving*. Yet her *Legend of Fray Baltazar* with its fiery and poetic beauty would have made a brilliant contrast with the other stories. Similarly, it seems to me that the poetic balance of the anthology is tipped in favor of T. S. Eliot and his school, the difficult or obscure poets who have been deeply influenced by French literature, while such poets as E. A. Robinson, Robert Frost, Edna St. Vincent

Millay, and Carl Sandburg, who would have contrasted strongly with the others, are unimpressively or indifferently represented. The editors give almost eight pages of Eliot's *Ash Wednesday*, almost ten of MacLeish's *Conquistador*, and eight of their own poetry, but only two pages of Robert Frost, a significant and characteristic poet from whose great qualities South Americans might more easily gain insight into American culture than from the delicate nuances of some of the poets represented more generously.

Recent months have seen a great outpouring in our country of American anthologies. Is this one a fresh collection, or does it repeat material already anthologized? I have recently seen Hemingway's *The Undeclared*, Benét's *The Devil and Daniel Webster*, Wallace Stevens' *Sunday Morning*, and Thurber's *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* (not in my opinion a first-rate example of Thurber) in other compilations. Frost's *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* and *Mending Wall*, and Sandburg's *Cool Tombs* do not need to be brought once more to the attention of American readers; there are other poems by these poets equally successful that deserve more renown. I was somewhat surprised to find *Ash Wednesday* here, since, while easier to read than *The Waste Land*, it is less exciting, less important, less great, and far more frequently reprinted. On the whole, however, *American Harvest* is the freshest anthology of our literature that I have seen recently. I am glad to confess that many of the selections I met here for the first time. The editors have succeeded in getting into their book the excitement, the freshness, and the vividness of great years in the history of American literature.

MAURICE BROWNING CRAMER

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